

## Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L PORT MORESBY 0676

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PGOV, PP

SUBJ: SOLOMON ISLAND ELECTION RESULTS

1. THE AUSTRALIAN HIGH COMMISSION AT PORT MORESBY HAS BEEN AUTHORIZED TO PASS A CONFIDENTIAL QUARTERLY SUMMARY OF ACTIVITIES IN THE SOLOMONS TO THIS EMBASSY. THE SUMMARY IS PREPARED BY AUSTRALIAN COMMISSIONER PHILIP JACKSON. FOLLOWING IS A RUNDOWN OF THE RECENT ELECTION INFORMATION AVAILABLE TO JACKSON AS OF JUNE 30.
  2. THE GENERAL ELECTION HELD ON JUNE 22, 1976 WAS LOW-KEY AND PRODUCED FEW SUPRISES. ALTHOUGH THE ELECTION WAS INTENDED BY THE UK TO BE IN THE NATURE OF A REFERENDUM ON THE INDEPENDENCE TIMETABLE, INDEPENDENCE AND OTHER NATIONAL ISSUES, THESE WERE NOT MENTIONED DURING THE ELECTION. THE CAMPAIGN CENTERED SOLELY ON LOCAL ISSUES IN EACH ELECTORATE.
  3. FOURTEEN OF THE FORMER TWENTY-FOUR MEMBERS OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY WERE REELECTED INCLUDING SIX MINISTERS AND THREE WHO HAVE HELD MINISTERIAL POSITIONS IN THE PAST. THIS IS CONSIDERABLY MORE THAN MOST PEOPLE EXPECTED AS, IN THE PAST, ELECTIONS HAVE RESULTED IN ALMOST A COMPLETE TURNOVER OF MEMBERS. TWO INCUMBENT MINISTERS, ASHLEY WICKHAM, MINISTER FOR WORKS AND PUBLIC UTILITIES, AND DAVID THUGUVODA, MINISTER FOR NATURAL RESOURCES, WERE DEFEATED. THE RESULT SHOWS AN IMPROVEMENT IN THE POLITICAL AWARENESS OF THE ELECTORATE IN THAT, WITH THE EXCEPTION OF WICKHAM, THE POLITICAL LIGHTWEIGHTS WERE DISPENSED WITH AND THE MORE SERIOUS MEMBERS
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REELECTED.

4. AN UNUSUAL FEATURE OF THESE ELECTIONS WAS THAT FOR THE FIRST TIME CANDIDATES STOOD ON BEHALF OF POLITICAL PARTIES. IN THE PAST CANDIDATES STOOD AS INDIVIDUALS AND THEN FORMED THEMSELVES INTO LOOSE GROUPS OR PARTIES WITHIN THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY. THIS TIME TWO POLITICAL PARTIES -- THE NATIONALISTS PARTY, ORGANIZED BY THE SOLOMON ISLANDS GENERAL WORKERS UNION, AND THE MELANESIAN ACTION PARTY, AN INDETERMINATE GROUPING OF YOUNG RADICALS, WERE FORMED BEFORE THE ELECTIONS. THE NATIONALISTS SUCCEEDED IN HAVING ONLY SEVEN OF THIRTY-ONE CANDIDATES ELECTED. THE MAP HAD NONE. AN ACTIVE LOBBYING CAMPAIGN IS NOW UNDERWAY TO FORM GROUPS FOR THE PURPOSES OF ELECTING A NEW CHIEF MINISTER. IT IS STILL TOO EARLY TO MAKE ANY ACCURATE ASSESSMENT OF WHO ARE LIKELY CANDIDATES FOR THE JOB. MAMALONI (WHO WON 70 PER CENT OF HIS ELECTORATE) STILL SEEMS TO HAVE ENOUGH SUPPORT TO BE REELECTED, BUT HE WILL ALMOST CERTAINLY BE CHALLENGED.

5. ANOTHER FEATURE OF THE ELECTION WAS THE POOR TURNOUT OF VOTERS. IN HONIARA ONLY ABOUT 30 PER CENT OF REGISTERED VOTERS VOTED AND IN OTHER PARTS OF THE SOLOMONS, EXCEPT THE WESTERN DISTRICT, ONLY ABOUT 40 PER CENT WAS THE AVERAGE. IN THE WEST OVER 60 PER CENT VOTED. THIS REFLECTS THE GREATER POLITICAL AWARENESS OF THE WESTERNERS.

6. IN SPITE OF THE FACT THAT FOURTEEN FORMER MEMBERS HAVE BEEN REELECTED, THERE ARE NOW TWENTY-FOUR NEW MEMBERS AND IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO SAY WHAT THEIR VIEWS ON NATIONAL ISSUES SUCH AS THE INDEPENDENCE TIMETABLE WILL BE OR HOW THEY WILL MOVE IN SUPPORTING ONE OR ANOTHER OF THE POLITICAL GROUPS WHICH ARE BEING FORMED.

7. COMMENT: IN ADDITION TO THIS SUMMARY WHICH APPEARS TO BE A REASONABLE INITIAL ASSESSMENT, THE SOLOMONS NEWS DRUM OF JUNE 25 CARRIED PRELIMINARY RESULTS OF THE ELECTION. THE NEWSPAPER NOTED THAT BOTH EAST AND WEST HONIARA HAD BEEN WON BY NATIONALISTS AND THAT BART ULUFA'ALU (EAST HONIARA) WAS NOW A MEMBER OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY. ALTHOUGH ULUFA'ALU ONLY HAS SEVEN INCLUDING HIMSELF, IN THE NEW LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY, HIS ELECTION GIVES NEW LEGITIMACY TO HIS MOVEMENT. HE COULD WELL COME TO AN UNDERSTANDING WITH MAMALONI ON THE CHIEF MINISTERSHIP RATHER THAN CONTEST IT

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NOW, HOWEVER, THE PRICE MAMALONI PAYS WILL CERTAINLY BE ONE OR MORE CABINET POSITIONS FOR THE NATIONALISTS. AS JACKSON NOTES, IT IS FAR TOO EARLY TO KNOW HOW THE DUST WILL SETTLE AND WHETHER THE VARIOUS GROUPINGS WILL OPT FOR A "GRAND COALITION" TO LEAD THE COUNTRY TO INDEPENDENCE, OR WHETHER GROUPS WILL DIVIDE SUFFICIENTLY TO PRODUCE A GENUINE OPPOSITION. THE VOTING FOR CHIEF MINISTER WILL BE THE FIRST IMPORTANT INDICATION OF WHICH WAY EVENTS

ARE GOING. END COMMENT.

8. EMBASSY WILL PROVIDE FINAL RESULTS OF THE ELECTION WHEN  
AVAILABLE.  
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